
RESEARCH DIALOGUES

Introduction to Research Dialogues

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A plethora of psychological findings illustrates how people manage to see themselves in a highly benevolent light:

On average, people say that they are 'above average' in skill (a conclusion that defies statistical possibility), overestimate the likelihood that they will engage in desirable behaviors and achieve favorable outcomes, furnish overly optimistic estimates of when they will complete future projects, and reach judgments with too much confidence." (Dunning, Heath, & Suls, 2004, p. 69)

Such self-serving biases have been attributed to motivated "wishful" thinking as well as "cold" cognitive processes, giving rise to considerable controversy over the role of motivation in social judgment throughout the 1970s and 1980s (Miller & Ross, 1975; Nisbett & Ross, 1980; for a review, see Kunda, 1990). As the dust settled, the field returned to an insight that Heider (1958) articulated decades earlier in a discussion of the criteria that make attributions acceptable to the attributer: "(1) The reason has to *fit the wishes* [italics added] of the person and (2) the datum has to be *plausibly derived* [italics added] from the reason" (p. 172). There is now broad consensus that our desires bias our judgments, yet their influence faces reality constraints.

In the target article, Dunning (2007a) reviews the strategies we use to see ourselves as capable, lovable, and moral individuals and explores their implications for consumer behavior. Conceptualizing decision making as a process of belief harmonization, he proposes that self-image motives play a key role in consumer behavior and explores their influence in a variety of judgment and choice phenomena. Kruger, Galek, and Burrus (2007) extend this discussion by highlighting some conditions under which decision makers may be overly self-critical. Drawing on recent research in personality psychology, Sedikides, Gregg, Cisek, and Hart (2007) suggest that the ones most swayed by self-image motives are narcissists. Their commentary reviews the role of narcissism in consumer behavior and highlights continuities

and discontinuities between narcissistic and non-narcissistic self-serving cognition. Dunning's (2007b) response completes these Research Dialogues, which complements earlier and future dialogues on the role of motivation, affect, and self-control in consumer behavior (Baumeister, Sparks, Stillman, & Vohs, in press; Han, Lerner, & Keltner, 2007; Strack, Werth, & Deutsch, 2006; Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2007).

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